

A

THE PRESENT AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

THE
INTERNAL CONDITION
OF THE
AMERICAN DEMOCRACY
CONSIDERED,
IN
A LETTER
FROM
THE HON. THOMAS D'ARCY M'GEE, M.P.
PRESIDENT OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE
PROVINCE OF CANADA,
TO
THE HON. CHARLES GAVAN DUFFY, M.P.
MINISTER OF PUBLIC LANDS OF THE COLONY OF
VICTORIA.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS Letter was written last year, by the Canadian statesman whose name it bears, to his former colleague of the *Nation* and the Irish Confederation, the present Minister of Public Lands at Melbourne. It will, perhaps, be considered worthy of an English edition—partly because Mr. M'Gee from a long residence in the United States, and a diligent study of their politics and their institutions, speaks with authority on the causes of what Mr. Disraeli has since, in his speech on the Address, called their present "Revolution;" partly also because his views are a valuable contribution to the public opinion of two great colonies, especially liable to be infected by the worst principles of the American political system. The difficulty, with which Mr. M'Gee admits the possible success of the South in its present contest with the North, will surprise some of his English readers. But his views upon this point are shared by many of that class in Canada, who have most thoroughly studied the public affairs of the great Commonwealth to which their country adjoins: and such views count for somewhat in the attitude which that Province has observed during the past year—an attitude which has been so much misunderstood and so absurdly assailed in England.

J. C. H.

LONDON, 19th March, 1863.

A LETTER,

&c.

"Democracy, as it seems, must next be considered, how it arises, and, when once arisen, what kind of man it produces." —*Plato*, *The Republic*, Book VIII. chap. 10.

MY DEAR DUFFY,—It is now nearly twenty years since we canvassed together the merits of the late Alexis De Tocqueville's work, "*Democracy in America*." The first part of that work came from the press, if I remember aright, about the year 1833, when the first Reformed Parliament had just assembled at Westminster, when the "*Citizen King*" sat on the throne of France, and when Andrew Jackson had been chosen a second time to the Presidency of the United States. It was an era of Democratic ascendancy, and De Tocqueville's mind, finely balanced as it was, was probably not unaffected by the reigning coincidences. When the complete work fell into our hands, we adopted most of his well-weighed and well-worded conclusions, or dissented from them, when we did dissent, not without a respectful hesitation and regret.

Though but thirty years have elapsed since M. de Tocqueville made his American tour, new facts have accumulated so rapidly in America, that if he were now to go over the same ground, familiar as he was with it formerly, much of his work would probably be re-written. Not that his main conclusions on the incompatibility of slavery and freedom, the inherent weakness of the Federal bond, the downward tendency of manners, or the phenomena of democratic armies, would be revoked; but he would find, it seems to me, that causes to which he assigned a long date

had already borne their natural fruits. He would find that many of those predictions of 1833, which apparently depended on ages for their fulfilment, had already come to pass; and that Time, for these new communities, travels faster and with a fuller wallet than for the rest of the world.

A former residence of several years in the Republic, and my present near neighbourhood to it, enable me to gratify in some particulars the keen curiosity with which you observe the American problem from your far Australian home. It is, indeed, for all lovers of well-regulated liberty, a study of the deepest and most painful interest. How much of the destiny of our *new* and your *newer* world is hidden under the dust and smoke of this conflict, the Author of all existence only knows. How much the Old World has at stake in the result, no human wisdom can presume to predict. If, by reason of my nearness to the stage, from which (so I fancy, at least) I can sometimes catch the whisper of the prompters behind the scenes, and several of the actors on which are to me tolerably familiar figures, I can add anything to your knowledge of the causes which are operating these eventful changes—if I can deduce from the consideration of these causes any hints serviceable to our free colonial communities, I shall feel that my wanderings westward from the common fatherland have not been altogether barren of useful lessons.

One thing our old instructor, De Tocqueville, clearly saw, that the *rise* of the American Democracy was natural and inevitable. In the primitive township governments, he found the germ of American Republicanism, which was to be harvested, not sown, by the Revolution of 1776. The colonies belonged to the Commons from the beginning, and from the very circumstances of their settlement. The British Crown did not emigrate, as that of

Portugal did afterwards to Brazil, nor was there any viceroyalty attempted on a scale commensurate with the importance of the country. The aristocracy did not emigrate, except in the army or in office, and then only to return. The embryo native aristocracy, slowly emerging out of the walks of commerce and the learned professions, were not sufficiently numerous or united to exercise any lasting control after the establishment of independence, though their power was far from inconsiderable in the original Congress. Three thousand heads of notable families, on the final establishment of the Republic, preferred exile and loyalty to submission, and were relieved from the Imperial Treasury at half the cost of West Indian emancipation—ten millions sterling! What remained in the new confederacy of the old colonial patricians, reunited by the veteran officers of the revolutionary army—the comrades in arms of the French *noblesse*—wielded a large occasional influence under the six first Presidents—even under Jefferson. Though intellectually a Jacobin, Jefferson was, by age and education, a colonial gentleman, and retained enough of his early friendships not to exclude altogether the accomplished men and women of that era from the inner circles of governmental influence. It was during Jackson's eight years, ending in 1837, that the new manners and new tone had their first great national triumph. Socially, President Quincy Adams was the last of the Republicans, and President Jackson was the first of the Democrats.

The social authority thus gradually eliminated from American society was never, perhaps, so much an appreciable quantity as a quality inherent, under various modifications, in all classes of the original United States' people. The social revolution by which it was overthrown was for many years re-

tarded by the Senate, the judges, the bar, the faculty, the older collegiate institutions, and the merchants of "the old school." The extension of population beyond the Alleghanies, the rough vigour of frontier life, the new men thrown by the wilderness into the national councils, broke down at Washington, in the most conspicuous centre of Republican rule, all the settled barriers and salutary observances of the old manners and old habits of thought. General Jackson, put forward and sustained by the new State of Tennessee—Mr. Douglas, put forward and sustained by the still newer State of Illinois, are illustrations of the rapid declension of official character. There was great native dignity, I am told by all who knew him, about General Jackson in his moments of action and anger; but neither in his treatment of his cabinet, nor of foreign powers, nor his choice of favourites, was he guided by that fine, all-respecting sense of propriety, which may be called the sixth sense of a gentleman. Mr. Douglas, a man of wonderful energy, felt the necessity in his latter days of attempting a part of authority to which he was—except by his talents alone—quite unfitted. In the days when he made his popularity, and in the prevailing party of those days, it was utterly impossible for any man, however distinguished, to exercise authority. Mr. Clay and Mr. Benton, though both Western men, were constitutionally of the older school; and, not unnaturally, the former was the determined enemy of Jackson, and the latter of Douglas. Of the other eminent statesmen of the last age, Mr. Webster and Mr. Calhoun were from old settled communities, and bore their stamp. Mr. Marcy seemed to pride himself in the *brusquerie* of a grazier, while Mr. Cass retained something of the ceremonial manner which he had acquired as Ambassador to France.

But we have known one chief magistrate to receive his friends while warming his naked feet at the fire ; a secretary of state addressing a Tammany mob in his shirt-sleeves ; and a commander-in-chief speaking from the balcony of his hotel *sans culottes*, and jesting on the circumstance in his speech. How different was the standard of manners, when Governor Hancock, of Massachusetts, declined to receive General Washington for three days together on a nice point of official precedence, and when Washington himself drove to open the first Congress under the Constitution of 1789, in a coach and six, with outriders and footmen in buff and blue !

Of the recent Presidents, seven of whom we have seen, and four or five of whom are still living, it is hardly permissible to speak freely. Able and amiable men they undoubtedly were ; but with the exception of Mr. Van Buren, and, perhaps, Mr. Buchanan, there was nothing strikingly superior in any of them. Explain it as they will, it is certainly a national misfortune when a succession of chief magistrates, raised electorally to the head of a great state, fail to inspire those who approach them with some degree of veneration. General Jackson, with all his levelling tendencies, did this by virtue of his headlong courage and decision ; but he was the last President of whom this could be said. Some of the great senators who failed to reach the Presidency attained to the better dominion in the hearts of their friends ; yet it was commonly remarked of them, that the sterling qualities which endeared them to their friends—that their very superiority was the main cause of defeating them as Presidential candidates.

I cannot but think also that a fatal inroad on the distinctions upheld by manners among Americans was made by the much-lauded Common School system of the Free States. It is a system mainly

the work of this generation, and this generation is mainly its work. Originating in Massachusetts some thirty years ago, it has been extended by the power of puffing and the fear of being thought retrograde over the whole of the North and West. It proceeds on the dangerous assumption that the children belong to the State; that mere school learning in youth will lead to punishment-saving in after life; that the public teacher may forestall the constable, and lighten the criminal calendar of half its horrors. The Common School, thus constituted, is the Democracy of boys, and diffuses an equality of manners, of which the average level in towns and cities, from one set of causes, and in rural districts from another, must needs be low. The parental office—the only magistracy cognisable to the youthful mind—is eliminated from the most important processes in the formation of character, and an inbred insensibility to the special claims of age and authority is the result produced by the agency, and at the cost of the State. You and I have been always advocates for cheapening the means and aids of education, and for recognizing intelligence as a privileged estate of the realm; but it does not follow that because we hold the State bound to aid and encourage Education, that therefore we concede to her the rights and duties of the aggregate parentage, or the establishment of one uniform system of mental and moral training, to the exclusion of every competitive system. On this subject Adam Smith is not yet obsolete; and he, you remember, was as zealous for freedom of public teaching, as he was for freedom of commerce. The American economists and *educationists* have, however, long ago gone beyond his authority, though I do not think they have yet answered all his arguments. Where the preliminary education is in common—whether the pupils be intended for the pulpit, the exchange, the bar, or the

sea—it is impossible that the first stratifications of character should not be laid on a low level. By such a process a forced uniformity of national character may be produced out of the most foreign materials; but the fine points of the individual must be all filed down; the original conception of a destined profession or calling can barely be entertained; and though the average ability of six-tenths of the generation may be drawn out by undergoing such an education, the highest ability of any one of them will rarely recover from the iron pressure of uniformity. From such undistinguishable associations and general confusion, the future merchant must catch something of the tone of the embryo preacher, and the coming sailor imbibe many of the mental traits of the prospective lawyer. In a merely artistic point of view the result will be a gallery of human daguerreotypes, all taken in the same attitude, by the same camera, and set out in frames of the like pattern and workmanship.

That this sketch of the social results of unclassified schooling in America is not merely fanciful, we have had recently an illustration in the pettifoggery of the captor of Messrs. Mason and Slidell. That the lower arts of mercantile success have penetrated even to the pulpit, one need only consult the advertising and editorial columns of the New York newspapers. The theatre is not more absolutely under the direction of managers and joint-stock directors than the popular pulpit in that and other large cities. In the selection of their topics the new school divines are not at all behind Mr. Barnum himself in their greedy appetite for novelties and monstrosities. A wreck at sea, a fire in the city, the sentimental suicide of a pair of guilty lovers, are texts more taking than any contained in the Pentateuch or the Holy Gospels. The jam at a "fashionable church" is quite equal to the jam at

"the opera," and the sensation newspaper of Monday morning cannot go to press without a report of the sensation sermon of the day before. By this alliance the demagogue of the Lord's day contrives to divide the empire of the demagogue of the laity. The puff preliminary of Saturday, the performance of Sunday, and the published report of Monday, enable him to halve the week with the worldlings and self-seekers, whom he has forgotten to combat, and can no longer pretend to condemn.

Among the many influences which, in the absence of customary safeguards, have been working a radical change in the character of the Americans—taking as their standard, Washington and his contemporaries—we must not overlook the steam-press, with its morning, noonday, and evening issues. The steam-press is largely an American invention, and, in its present wonderfully improved form, an invention of the last twenty years. In no country in the world has it had such absolute freedom and so universal a patronage as in the North American States and cities. Some curious statist estimated a few years ago that there were issued in New York alone each morning, newspaper sheets enough to cover twenty-seven superficial acres! Editions of 50,000 copies per day, and upwards, have been claimed by the better known penny and twopenny journals. Imagine the vast inflation of ideas which must have followed from such production and such consumption! Imagine what a power for evil an able man, without a conscience, may derive by sitting behind an untaxed penny press, driven by steam! Neither the Athenian nor Roman orators, nor the popular preachers during the Crusades nor at the Reformation, ever wielded so tremendous an engine. If American public opinion often betrays a childish petulance, a sad indifference to life and character, and a barbarian relish for mere specta-

ular excitement, to the American penny press, all-powerful as it has been in the formation of that opinion for the last twenty or thirty years, we may fairly trace the principal cause of such deplorable and dangerous caprices.

If anywhere, most assuredly in that state of society where it was practically exempt from all other law, the popular press ought to have tried to be "a law unto itself." If anywhere, its members ought there to have striven to raise their calling to the dignity of a profession, by surrounding themselves with some of those safeguards which the bar and faculty still retain as essential to professional respectability. Association might have remedied what the law could not well reach. I am not, as you may suppose, about to discuss the relative merits or demerits of avowed and anonymous writing, or any other modification of the Press—that would take us quite too far out of our proper path. I will only invite you, in order to aid your estimate of the revolution in ideas and in manners, to consider for a moment the mental contrast between an average American of the year 1760, whose favourite reading was the Bible and Bunyan, and Fox's "Martyrs," with an average American of these days, whose *vade mecum* is the *Rowdy Journal*, or some novelette weekly, filled with maudlin love stories and exploits of pirates and burglars.

As if to confirm the foolish pride which almost all Americans took in the moral and social revolution at work within their country, its material condition from the Peace of Ghent (1818) to the election of Mr. Lincoln was one of unexampled and apparently unlimited prosperity. Those radical changes in the character of the population to which I have referred must be for good, else how did commerce increase?—why was money abundant?—how came population to advance so rapidly? These were the arguments

and assurances with which the more thoughtful minds among that people were satisfied or silenced, whenever an unquiet apprehension arose within them, least, peradventure, in making their society as independent and as unlike Europe as possible, they might not be stripping themselves too bare of ancient usages and ancestral prejudices. Nor have I lately seen any marked indications that such a suspicion has been revived or confirmed by the calamities of the Civil War. If it exists among the better educated minds, it has not as yet found any very emphatic public expression ; though it is possible it may do so, even while this letter is on its way to you, in Australia.

With the common run of North Americans, on the contrary, it has been the invariable assumption that, as a people, *they* have not radically changed. They seem to receive as gospel every commonplace compliment on their fidelity to the example of their "revolutionary fathers." In the maintenance of the broad simple theory of their institutions—that they shall be democratic and electoral, rather than monarchical or subordinated into classes—I believe they do hold with the more advanced revolutionists of 1776, and even go beyond them. But in most of their other notions, as to the constitution and administration of the Government—as to the Executive office, the settlement of new territories, the reserved rights of the States, the management of the finances, the appointment and prerogatives of the Supreme Court—as to the elective judgeship, the dignity and duty of ambassadors, the limits of consular authority, and the whole of their views in relation to popular education and popular interference with the constituted authorities—I think it might easily be demonstrated that they are much farther removed from the example of their ancestors of 1776 than that cautious and ceremonious generation

were from that of *their* ancestors, who took part in the English revolution of 1688. Do I argue from this, simply because they have so far departed from the ways of their fathers, that therefore this generation of Americans must *necessarily* be in all respects in the wrong? By no means. But I do contend, having so changed, and yet being so ignorant of their change, that they have not yet attained to that *minimum* of self-knowledge which is essential to a sustained and stable national character. I do contend that, in the pursuit of an un-European uniformity of manners and maxims, they have really abandoned a very precious part of the inheritance bequeathed them by their colonial ancestors; and I point this moral for the benefit of our fellow colonists in your country and in my own, who have not yet learned to blush for being the Old World's offspring, in whose throats the words "Fatherland," "Mother Country," do not stick as a confession of inferiority or a declaration of base dependence.

It is not the least striking of the many strange characteristics of all American States which have separated by force from their original parentage, that their present prejudices are precisely in the inverse ratio of their former intimacy. Thus the most unpopular man (or the man against whom suspicion is most easily roused) in the United States, is the Englishman; as in Mexico it is the Spaniard, and in Brazil the Portuguese. But while there exists this antipathy, this irritability against the Englishman in the Northern States (and, I believe, in the Southern also), let me assure you that neither Cockney nor Yorkshireman is regarded with contempt. *That* sentiment is reserved almost invariably for "the Irish and *Dutch*"—as the Germans generally are called. Some of our old friends in Ireland are, I see, falling into the error so often repeated, and so bitterly repented in the

past history of our fatherland, of fancying they have a sure ally abroad, where in truth they have no such reliance. Very sincere friends and well-wishers among Americans, the Irish people, no doubt, have ; but that there is, or ever was, any such thing as *a national American sentiment*, more friendly to Ireland than to Italy, or Egypt, or Russia, or Japan, I do not believe. Our friends "at home," however unpleasant may be the truth in this particular, cannot learn it, for their own sakes, too soon.

But to return to our main business. I have not touched, as you may observe, on the actual conflict between the Slave and Free States—the South and the North—nor do I intend to do so. Whatever I have felt free to say or to write on the merits of that deplorable quarrel, with a proper consideration for Canadian interests, has already reached you in print. I sympathized from the first, and do still (though in a less degree) sympathize with the legitimate Government at Washington in its death-grapple with a most unjustifiable rebellion. But this sympathy did not lead me the length of inviting an invasion of Canada ; nor does it lead me the length of desiring peaceable annexation. It does not blind me to the follies and bigotries of the cotemporary American character ; it does not reconcile me to their ravenous "manifest destiny ;" nor has it utterly extinguished all recollection of the merciless social war which I have seen waged on our emigrant countrymen, seven short years ago, throughout the length and breadth of that then united and prosperous land. When the clouds were darkest over Washington I scorned to listen to the promptings of retaliation ; but when these clouds have passed away in peace (as I trust they may soon pass) the States will owe a deep debt of compensation, for recent services and previous sufferings, to their Irish inhabitants. Will they pay that debt

when peace ensues? I trust so; but I have my doubts.

Nothing could give me (I know you will understand this feeling) greater satisfaction than to see the American people come out of this agony of civil war disciplined, moderated, liberalised, and recollected. It is as absurd to deny their great energy as to under-rate their great resources. But their character as a people is still to be made, and they will have reason to be thankful for the searching ordeal which has fallen upon them, if it can only teach them that national reputation cannot be made (as individual reputation too often is made among them) by sheer force of pretension and puffery. If the Civil War teaches them to pitch their tone somewhat lower in the councils of Christendom than was done at Ostend—to estimate Europe less arrogantly—to remember the presence of other Powers in the Pacific and the Atlantic—to look on Spanish America and British America more modestly and less avariciously—they will not have been the first people to whom a great calamity has turned out a great blessing in disguise. If, also, it subdues that extreme pride of *nativism*, which led those born on the soil of the Union to despise all foreign-born persons coming amongst them, even while inviting them to come, it will have been still further a blessing to the myriads of our original countrymen, who are, while I write, in the front of the battle, and who will not, we must hope, be left in the rear of the national remembrance when all the fighting is over.

But, however the people of the States may choose to read the lesson of their late experience, I sincerely trust, my dear Duffy, you will agree with me when I say that to Irish settlers in British colonies, and other Irishmen about to emigrate, it ought not to be an example and a warning given in vain. I well remember how, in your excellent

letter to the Rev. Dr. Lang, of Sydney, soon after your arrival in Australia, you showed it to be the part of wisdom, for colonies like yours and ours, to work out, patiently and in good faith, their existing free institutions. In that spirit I have acted since I transferred my household gods to the valley of the St. Lawrence. This letter, with which I now trouble you, is a prompting of that same spirit. For, though no one respects less those who are capable of dropping or picking up their principles in a time of panic, I do believe this American *bouleversement* should teach us to cherish our European connexion as a blessing second in value only to domestic self-government. If I have learned anything by years of observation in the Free States of the adjoining Union, and in these parallel provinces, it is that the colonial condition of society, though not without follies, exaggerations, and inherent weaknesses of its own, has yet compensating advantages under the present system of locally responsible government, which far outweigh all its inconveniences and deficiencies. I have learned, not from books merely, but on the spot, and often against the grain, that the Republican States, though gaining immediately and immensely by the establishment of their independence, starting into existence with a population of three millions to half a continent, have yet bled internally, and suffered most severe social losses by their too early, too angry, and too complete severance from the common body of Christendom, and common stock of Old World ideas, traditions, and usages. They have gone on their way, however, and are now beyond remedy as to the forfeited deposit of their civilization. I know the more sanguine among them maintain that it is their mission to establish a "new civilization," the tripod of which shall fling its creative and fructifying light from Boston over all the new regions of the

earth, Arctic and Antaretic. How far recent events may have chastised this folly out of the Lyceum-bred imagination, I do not pretend to say; but I assure you it is seriously upheld by all "the Hundred Boston Orators," not to speak of the professors, "poets," and paragraphists. For us, free colonists, speaking the English speech, the most valuable instruction they can afford us, in my poor opinion, they have already given. Their vain proclamations, rightly weighed, are words of warning. Their social discoveries are often fatal secrets, over which our wiser ancestors would have made the Sign of the Cross. Their irreverent youth and independent matronage are not moral improvements to be desired. Their inbred contempt for "foreigners" is fit only for the latitude of Pekin. Their State school system seems to me false in its basis, and fatal in its effects. While, last of all, the examples set by their recent political men are examples for the most part devoutly to be avoided. But of this enough.

Believe me,

My dear DUFFY,

Always very faithfully yours,

THOMAS D'ARCY M'GEE.